

Message Text

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ACTION EB-08

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CAB-05 CIAE-00 COME-00
DODE-00 DOTE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00 FAA-00 TRSE-00
PM-04 H-02 L-03 NSC-05 PA-02 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15
USIA-15 SIL-01 LAB-04 OMB-01 /088 W
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R 051748Z APR 77

FM AMEMBASSY PARIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1442

INFO AMEMBASSY LONDON

FAA BRUSSELS

AMCONSUL BORDEAUX

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 10008

E.O. 11652 N/A

TAGS: EAIR, EIND, FR, US

SUBJ: CIVAIR: WILL AIR FRANCE BUY 737'S?

1. THE FRENCH PUBLIC IS CERTAINLY BEING SERVED UP A HEAVY DOSE OF "CAUSES CELEBRES" IN THE CIVAIR FIELD THESE DAYS. WITH ACTIVE INTEREST IN CONCORDE HAVING SUBSIDED SOMEWHAT TEMPORARILY (EVEN THE NEW YORK PORT AUTHORITY'S ANNOUNCEMENT THAT IT WOULD PROBABLY NOT TAKE ITS DECISION ON APRIL 14 RECEIVED ONLY PASSING MENTION IN THE PRESS) AND WORD BEING AWAITED SOON ON WHETHER THE ASMR WILL FLY OR DIE, THE LATEST FLURRY OF EXCITEMENT IS OVER WHETHER AIR FRANCE WILL BE AUTHORIZED TO BUY BOEING 737'S. THIS IS THE DECISION ON AIR FRANCE FLEET RENEWAL, THAT HAS BEEN KEPT PENDING FOR AT LEAST TWO YEARS.

2. ABOUT A WEEK AGO THE PRESS REPORTED THAT AIR FRANCE WOULD RECEIVE FROM THE GOF AUTHORIZATION TO BUY THE 737'S. THIS TOUCHED OFF UNCLASSIFIED

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A FLURRY OF COMMENT. THE NATIONAL FEDERATION OF METALWORKERS OF FORCE OUVRIERE IMMEDIATELY ISSUED A COMMUNIQUE PROTESTING SUCH ACTION AS CONTRARY TO THE INTERESTS OF THE FRENCH AIRCRAFT INDUSTRY. THE TRADE UNIONS AT THE SNIAS PLANT IN TOULOUSE REPORTEDLY ARE PLANNING A SERIES OF PROTEST MEETINGS. GEORGES CARPENTIER,

A SOCIALIST DEPUTY FROM THE ST. NAZAIRE REGION (WHERE ONE OF THE SNIAS PLANTS IS LOCATED) SUBMITTED A WRITTEN PARLIAMENTARY QUESTION ASKING WHETHER THE REPORT OF THE 737 PURCHASE WAS CORRECT AND, IF SO, WHAT IT WOULD MEAN FOR THE FUTURE OF THE AIRBUS AND THE MERCURE 200. JEROME MONOD, SYG OF THE RPR, ISSUED A COMMUNIQUE OPPOSING THE PURCHASE OF 737'S. OTHER SOLUTIONS EXIST, HE SAID, IF THE TROUBLE IS TAKEN TO EXPLORE THEM. "SEVERAL" TYPES OF MEDIUM-RANGE AIRCRAFT BUILT BY THE FRENCH OR IN COOPERATION WITH EUROPEAN INDUSTRY ARE AVAILABLE "OR COULD BE OVER THE SHORT TO MEDIUM TERM," MONOD ARGUED, AND IN THE MEANTIME HE SUGGESTED THAT THE CARAVELLES IN AIR FRANCE'S FLEET COULD BE OUTFITTED WITH NEW ENGINES. (RE-ENGINEING OF THE CARAVELLES WAS ALSO ONE SOLUTION PROPOSED BY FORCE OUVRIERE.) PURCHASE OF 737'S BY AIR FRANCE WOULD DEFINITELY COMPROMISE CHANCES FOR DEVELOPMENT (BY FRANCE) OF A NEW MEDIUM-RANGE AIRCRAFT, CONCLUDED MONOD.

3. STATE SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION CAVAILLE IN A RADIO INTERVIEW ISSUED A "CATEGORICAL DENIAL" THAT AIR FRANCE HAD BEEN AUTHORIZED TO BUY 737'S. HE SAID THAT THE QUESTION OF AIR FRANCE FLEET RENEWAL, AS WELL AS A WHOLE RANGE OF CIVAIR PROBLEMS, WILL BE STUDIED BY AN INTERMINISTERIAL COMMITTEE IN THE NEAR FUTURE. THE GOF'S DECISION, HE SAID, WOULD TAKE ACCOUNT OF UNCLASSIFIED

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THE INTERESTS OF BOTH AIR FRANCE AND THE FRENCH AIRCRAFT INDUSTRY.

4. AIR FRANCE ITSELF HAS JOINED THE FRAY WITH A PUBLIC STATEMENT CONFIRMING THAT THE 737 IS ITS PREFERENCE AS REPLACEMENT FOR ITS CARAVELLES. AIR FRANCE SAID AIRBUS WILL BE RELIED ON PRIMARILY FOR HANDLING GROWTH IN ITS MEDIUM-RANGE TRAFFIC AND ITS AIRBUS FLEET COULD INCREASE TO AS MANY AS THIRTY AIRCRAFT. HOWEVER, ON LOW DENSITY ROUTES AIR FRANCE STILL FORESAW NEED FOR AIRCRAFT OF ONE HUNDRED PASSENGER CAPACITY AND THE ONLY AIRCRAFT HAVING SATISFACTORY OPERATING COSTS IN THIS CATEGORY WERE AIRCRAFT OF US MANUFACTURE, NAMELY, DC-9 AND 737. AIR FRANCE WISHED TO BUY ABOUT TEN SUCH AIRCRAFT THIS YEAR AND AS MANY MORE NEXT YEAR. FOR LOGISTICAL REASONS AIR FRANCE PREFERRED THE 737, SINCE PRESENCE OF 727'S IN ITS FLEET ALREADY WOULD

SIMPLIFY REPAIR AND MAINTENANCE OF 737'S AND ALSO

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MEAN SAVINGS IN PILOT TRAINING.

5. THE FINANCIAL DAILY LES ECHOS AND ALSO
THE COMMUNIST DAILY L'HUMANITE ON APRIL 5 NOTE THAT
CAVILLE HAD SAID ONLY THAT THE GOF "HADN'T"
BUT NOT THAT IT "WOULDN'T" AUTHORIZE AIR FRANCE
TO PURCHASE 737'S. L'HUMANITE URGES THAT FUNDS
BE MADE AVAILABLE BY THE GOF FOR THE LAUNCHING
OF NEW CIVIL TRANSPORT AIRCRAFT BY SNIAS
WITH AIR FRANCE KEEPING ITS CARAVELLES IN OPERATION
FOR ANOTHER FEW YEARS UNTIL A NEW FRENCH-BUILT
AIRCRAFT IS AVAILABLE. ONLY THIS WILL SAFEGUARD
THE FRENCH INDUSTRY AND "NATIONAL INDEPENDENCE,"
WRITES L'HUMANITE. LES ECHOS CLAIMS THAT PRIME
MINISTER BARRE HAS ALREADY GIVEN AN INFORMAL
COMMITMENT TO AIR FRANCE REGARDING THE PURCHASE
OF 737'S. THIS IS SAID TO HAVE OCCURRED IN THE CON-
TEXT OF RENEGOTIATION OF THE STATUTES GOVERNING
RELATIONS BETWEEN THE GOF AND AIR FRANCE, WHICH
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IS NOW UP FOR GOF APPROVAL. AS FOR THE CAUSES OF
THE PRESENT SITUATION, LES ECHOS PLACES THE BLAME
ON THE "INCOHERENCE" OF GOF POLICY IN THE CIVAIR FIELD,
WITH THE GOF TORN BETWEEN THE NEED TO DEFEND BOTH
AIR FRANCE'S INTERESTS AND THOSE OF THE AIRCRAFT
INDUSTRY AND THE INDUSTRY ITSELF HAVING BEEN
SADDLED FOR TOO LONG WITH PRESTIGE PROJECTS,
BEGINNING WITH CONCORDE.
GAMMON.

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